



This is a longer version, researched and written in 2012-2013, of the article published in the Spring 2014 issue of *Louisiana Cultural Vistas* (now *64 Parishes*). I have added illustrations. Note that information about buildings mentioned in the article has changed since 2014. Some attempts have been made to stabilize the Karnofsky Store, the Iroquois Theater, and the Eagle Saloon, but when I was in New Orleans in 2019 they were still vacant and covered with graffiti. The F & F Botánica and Spiritual Church Supply Company closed a few years ago when the manager died.

Carolyn Morrow Long, 2020

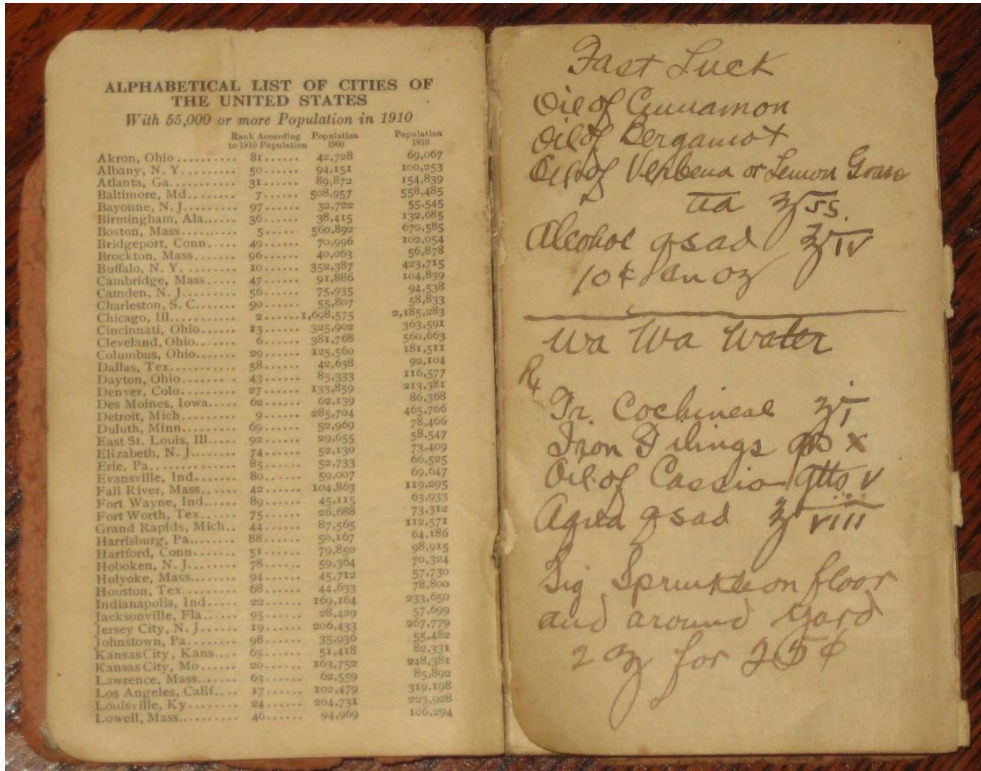
The Cracker Jack: A Hoodoo Drugstore in the “Cradle of Jazz”

The Cracker Jack, in business from 1907 to 1974, was New Orleans’ most famous and longest-running “hoodoo drugstore.” New Orleans is often associated with Voodoo, a legitimate and organized Afro-Catholic religion that developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Elsewhere in the mostly Protestant South, there was no such religious structure, but African-descended people practiced a system of magic known as hoodoo, conjure, or rootwork. Before the abolition of slavery, hoodoo was most often employed for health and well-being and for protection against an abusive master. Later on, it was directed toward ensuring beneficial interactions with lovers, family, friends, neighbors, customers, and employers, guarding against those who intended harm, cursing one's enemies, and controlling external forces like luck. These ends were accomplished through rituals and the use of powders, baths and washes, anointing oils, fumigants, and magical power objects made from common household substances, plants, minerals, and animal parts.

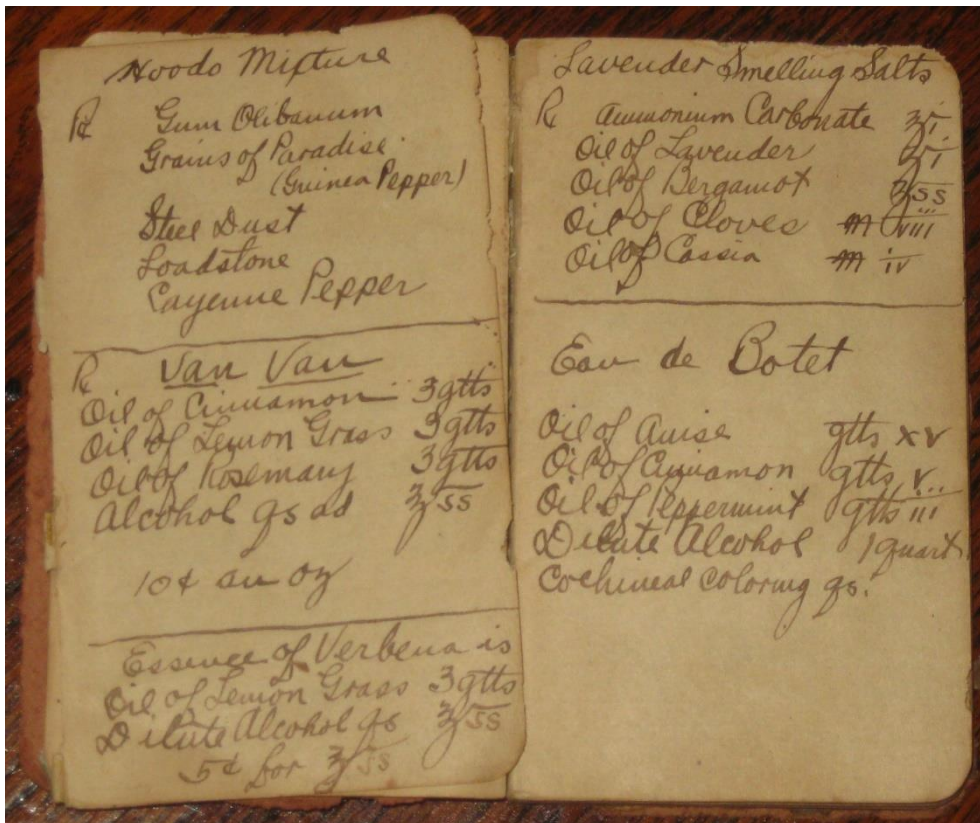
By the turn of the twentieth century New Orleans’ Voodoo religion had been forced underground by lawmakers, public opinion, and the church, but believers continued to practice a distinctly New Orleans style of hoodoo. These practitioners found the necessary supplies at what came to be called the “hoodoo drugstore.” Such places were usually operated by a white, professionally trained pharmacist who, in response to customer requests, began to formulate “magical” potions.

Those who served a predominantly black clientele simply responded to the requests of their patrons and gradually found themselves formulating “magical” powders, washes, baths, and oils. The color and smell was determined by the desired result. Pink was for love, blue for protection, white for peace, red or purple for victory, and green or gold for wealth; these positive charms had a pleasant scent. Those meant to cause strife and bad luck were colored brown or black, and were made to have a disagreeable odor. Hot ingredients like ginger and pepper were added to make the mixture seem more powerful. Lodestone, a magnetic ore, was popular because its ability to attract iron filings symbolized luck-drawing and attraction. Eventually the hoodoo drugstores sold dried herbs, lodestones and crystals; animal teeth, claws, and bones; and incense, candles, oils, perfumes, powders, and soaps that were alleged to have supernatural properties. They also sold books of dream interpretation and lucky numbers, and books of magical formulae.¹

A display at the New Orleans Pharmacy Museum provides an idea of what would have been sold at an early hoodoo drugstore. The pages of a small notebook, dated 1910, are filled with handwritten recipes for toothache drops, tonic, cough syrup, dandruff cure, cathartic, tape worm mixture, and remedies for piles, lumbago, boils, and indigestion. But the first two pages contain formulae for magical potions.



“Fast Luck” was oil of cinnamon, oil of bergamot, oil of verbena, and denatured alcohol. “Wa Wa Water” was tincture of cochineal (a red dye), iron filings, oil of cassia, and water; it was to be “sprinkled on the floor and around the yard.”



“Hoodoo Mixture” was gum olibanum, grains of paradise, iron filings, lodestone, and cayenne pepper. “Van-Van,” a popular good luck charm, was oil of cinnamon, oil of lemon grass, oil of rosemary, and denatured alcohol.

The Pharmacy Museum also exhibits brown glass screw-top jars bearing hand-lettered labels such as Flying Devil, Love, Get Away, Lucky, Come to Me, Drawing, Controlling, Success, Goofer Dust, and Goddess of Evil. The jars are numbered, presumably for easier ordering.



Photos of notebooks and jars courtesy of the New Orleans Pharmacy Museum

By the 1930s some hoodoo drugstores, along with a few book publishers and makers of toiletries, cosmetics, and cleaning products, had developed into large-scale manufacturers and wholesalers of what were known in the trade as “spiritual products.” These items, made from some combination of water, alcohol, soap, oil, talc, dyes, and fragrances, bore labels with titles and images suggestive of their use. No rituals were conducted during the formulation of these products and few of them contained any actual herbs, minerals, or animal parts. None of these pioneering companies were located in New Orleans. Miami (later Birmingham) had Sonny Boy Products, Memphis had Keystone and Lucky Heart, Baltimore had the Clover Horn, New York had Amateau and Original Products, but the real evolution of the spiritual products business occurred in far-off Chicago, where the L.W. DeLaurence Company, Valmor, and Lama Temple made and marketed their products.²

The Cracker Jack Drug Store, located at 435 South Rampart Street, was owned by Dr. George Andre Thomas. Dr. Thomas was born in New Orleans to Belgian parents in 1874.³ His family home was an attractive frame house on Chestnut Street in a middle-class white neighborhood in the lower Garden District. Thomas began, like other white pharmacists, by operating an ordinary drugstore and eventually became a hoodoo entrepreneur. He first appeared in the city directory for 1896, where he was listed as a clerk at the drugstore of Pierre F. Caillier at 1132 Poydras Street just off South Rampart. George Thomas lived with

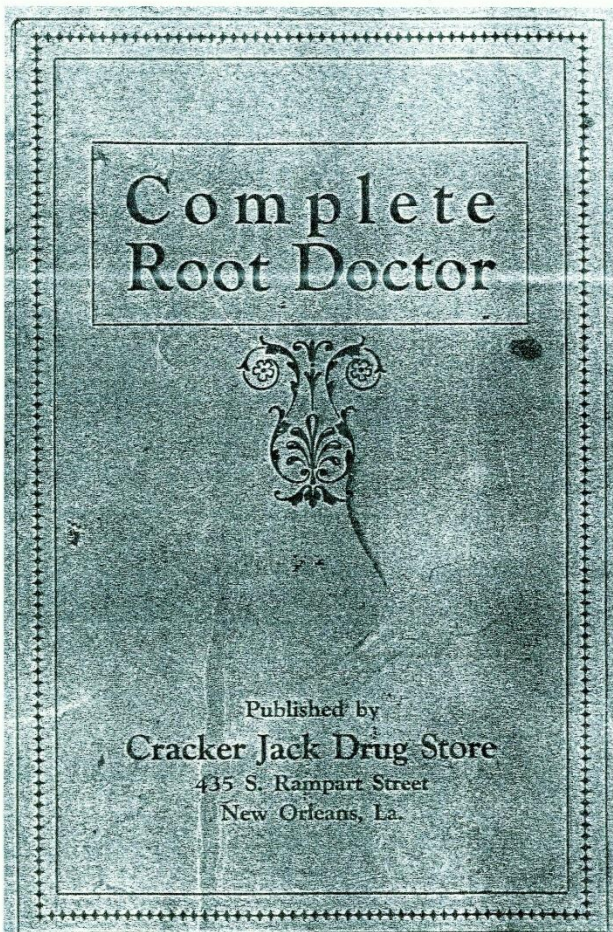
the Caillier family in rooms above the store. By 1897, he had taken over Caillier's business and renamed it George A. Thomas Drugs. He received his medical degree from Tulane University in 1907 and was listed in the city directory as both a druggist and a physician. According to the American Medical Directory for 1912-14, he specialized in urology.⁴

A few years after establishing George A. Thomas Drugs on Poydras Street, Dr. Thomas began acquiring property in the square bounded by the 400 blocks of South Rampart and Basin streets and the 1100 blocks of Perdido and Poydras streets.

During the next couple of decades this square and the surrounding area would play a significant role in the development of jazz. Because it was on the opposite (back) side of the original French Quarter, it was called "Back-o-Town." The neighborhood was home to clothing stores, grocers, bakeries, meat markets, pharmacies, barber shops, beauty parlors, theaters, saloons, and restaurants. The Poydras Market occupied the neutral ground (median) for several blocks along Poydras Street. Young Louis Armstrong shot off a handgun in front of the Eagle Saloon, corner of South Rampart and Perdido, on New Year's Eve 1913 and landed in the Colored Waifs' Home. Nightclubs like the Golden Dragon, the Parisian Roof Garden, and the Cinderella Ballroom, and venues like the Odd Fellows Hall (located on the third floor of the Eagle Saloon building), Pythian Temple, and the Union Sons of Honor Hall (nicknamed the "Funky Butt") featured the most important jazz performers of the day, such as Buddy Bolden, Louis Armstrong, A.J. Piron, Papa Celestin, and John Robichaux. The Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club and the Jolly Boys and Girls Mardi Gras parades started on South Rampart, and it was there that the Baby Dolls masking tradition began.

New Orleans' infamous red-light district, nicknamed Storyville for city councilman Sidney Story, was created by municipal ordinance in 1897 in an attempt to limit prostitution to an area bounded by Iberville, North Basin, St. Louis, and North Robertson streets, behind the French Quarter. Storyville was closed down by the Secretary of the Navy in 1917 because of its presumed evil influence on U.S. servicemen stationed in New Orleans at the beginning of World War I. Another unofficial "vice district," sometimes called Black Storyville, existed a few blocks uptown behind the South Rampart Street corridor.

The proprietors of the higher-class "sporting houses" published little guides, called Blue Books, for potential customers, giving the addresses of the brothels and the names of the prostitutes. These booklets also contained advertisements for various products and services, including drugstores offering alleged remedies for venereal diseases; most of these were topical ointments containing mercuric chloride and arsenic.⁵



Dr. Thomas never advertised in the Blue Books during the heyday of Storyville, but in 1929 the Cracker Jack published a little booklet titled *The Complete Root Doctor*, offering cures and advice for various ailments, especially syphilis and gonorrhea. These were presumably herbal remedies formulated by Dr. Thomas, a specialist in urology.

The Cracker Jack sold “Old 76—the standard remedy for unnatural discharges,” “White C Powder—for men only.” “Neuro-Fort” and “Naturine Tablets” were alleged to remedy what would now be called “erectile dysfunction” and treated with testosterone supplements.⁶

Dr. George A. Thomas, as a man of Belgian Catholic descent, was something of an anomaly among the Back-o-Town’s population of laboring-class Protestant African Americans and Eastern European Jewish merchants like the Schulmanns, Karnofskys, Itzkovitchs, Paillets, and Fertels.⁷ He nevertheless seems to have been attracted to the neighborhood, and chose it as his home and place of business.

On May 16, 1906, Dr. Thomas paid second-hand dealer Abraham Schulmann \$11,500 for a two-story brick store at 435 South Rampart. Between 1894 and 1896, this building had been the site of a barber shop owned by string-band leader Charley Galloway and a hangout of jazz pioneer Buddy Bolden.⁸ In 1907 Thomas moved his pharmacy to 435 South Rampart and lived in the upstairs apartment.⁹ At first the business was listed in the

city directories as George A. Thomas Drugs, but by at least 1914 it was known as the Cracker Jack, a term signifying something sharp, snappy, or first-rate.¹⁰

The only known photograph of the Cracker Jack building is this April 1951 illustration from *Ebony Magazine*. There is nothing to indicate that it was New Orleans' leading purveyor of hoodoo supplies. A small sign simply says "Cracker Jack," and advertisements for Exlax, Hadacol, Stanback, and Gillette razor blades can be seen in the display windows. In the accompanying article, "The Truth About Voodoo," Edward Clayton noted that South Rampart Street had several hoodoo drugstores: "These druggists fill voodoo prescriptions with the same dispatch and attention they would give to a regular medical draft, although most admit they don't know if 'the stuff' works or not. One such drugstore is the Cracker Jack, a rather forlorn and dismal-looking place that has done a lucrative business dispensing such wares for more than two generations and is still said to be one of the most popular sources of voodoo paraphernalia in New Orleans."



Cracker Jack drugstore is most popular sales place for voodoo paraphernalia in New Orleans. Oldtimers say owners once displayed roots, herbs and other items so prominently and had such brisk trade, that police were dispatched for probe.

In 1909 Dr. Thomas bought two more buildings on South Rampart.



In July he paid Selig Paillet, also a second-hand dealer, \$13,750 for a store at 413-415 South Rampart. City directories show that Paillet continued to operate his store there until 1912, when it became the Iroquois Theater, a vaudeville house that served black audiences and featured African American touring acts and local performers. The theater was the venue for many fund-raising benefits for Negro charities, and after 1920 it also showed motion pictures. Dr. Thomas was never involved in the management of the Iroquois, but leased the space to Paul L. Ford. The theater was in business until 1927.¹¹



In August 1909 Dr. Thomas bought 427 South Rampart, adjacent to his drugstore, from pawnbroker Jacob Itzkovitch for \$13,000.¹² Within a few years he had rented the building to the Karnofsky family, beloved in jazz history as the benefactors and surrogate parents of young Louis Armstrong, who lived at the time at the corner of Liberty and Perdido.

Photos of the Iroquois Theater and the Karnofsky Building by Carolyn Long, 2012

Louis Karnofsky and his wife Rebecca “Tillie” Kaufmann were Russian Jewish immigrants who arrived in New York in the 1880s and eventually settled in New Orleans. They began as peddlers and second-hand dealers in the neighborhood around Basin, Girod and South Rampart streets. Thanks to hard work and thrift, Louis and Tillie Karnofsky and their children, Meyer, Morris, Alex, Hyman, Lillian, David, Sarah, Eva, and Nick, achieved wealth and social standing. Louis Karnofsky first appeared in the 1894 New Orleans city directory as a peddler residing at 189 South Basin Street; In 1899 he had a second-hand store at 306 South Rampart. The entire family was enumerated in the 1910 census at 1304 Girod near the corner of Franklin.¹³ By 1914 the Karnofskys had established their home and business at Dr. Thomas’s building, 427 South Rampart. In 1919 Tillie Karnofsky was operating a second-hand store at that address.



The Karnofsky family (shown here around 1917), helped Louis Armstrong buy his first horn, jazz scholars say.

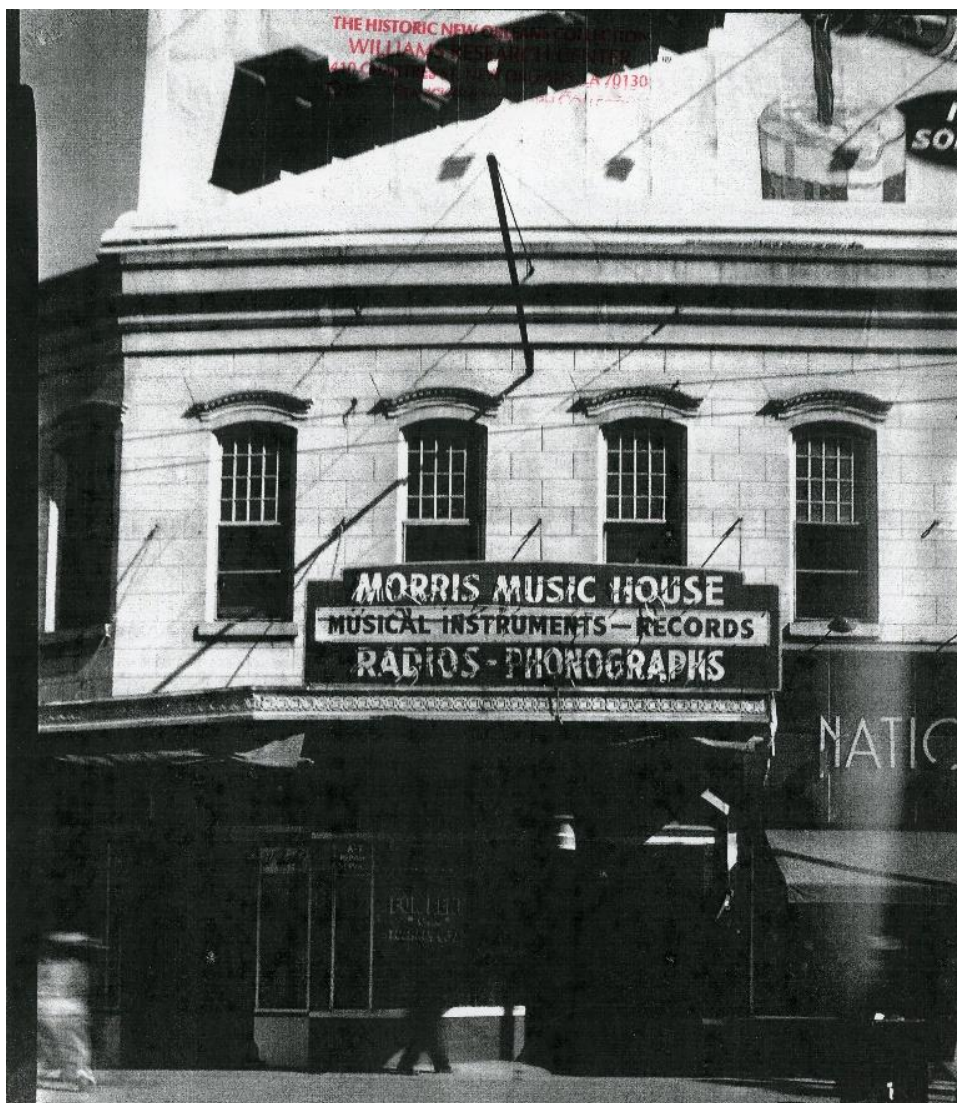
Image of the Karnofsky family from <http://www.jazzmusicarchives.com>

Throughout the 1920s one of the Karnofsky sons, Alex, had a tailoring shop at 427 South Rampart. The entrance still retains a blue-and-white tile marker, “The Model Tailors,” set into the sidewalk.



Photo by Carolyn Long 2012.

Five-year-old Louis Armstrong began working for the Karnofskys' junk and coal business in 1906. Armstrong wrote in a 1947 article that he “used to...work on one of those coal wagons for a young white boy whose folks had several wagons that paraded all over the city... They were the Karnoffsky [sic] family... I couldn't hardly wait until I would get out of school to get up on that wagon with Morris Karnoffsky and help him deliver that stone coal....When I would be on the junk wagon...I had a little tin horn, the kind the people celebrates with--I would blow this...horn...as a call for old rags, bones, bottles, or anything that the people had to sell... After blowing the tin horn so long, I wondered how I would do with a real horn... I saw a little cornet in a pawn shop--five dollars...the Karnofskys loaned me on my salary--I saved 50¢ a week and bought the horn.”¹⁴



Morris Music House,
168 South Rampart,
courtesy The Historic
New Orleans
Collection.

Morris Karnofsky founded his Morris Music House in 1922, after he returned from military service in World War I. During the early years of the business, his sisters Lillian and Sarah worked there as clerks. Although it is widely believed that Morris Music originated in the Karnofsky store building at 427 South Rampart, city directories and newspaper advertisements show that over the years it was located at 602, 726, 230, 205, and finally at 168 South Rampart, but never at 427. Morris Music sold jazz and blues recordings, musical instruments, radios and phonographs, and offered instruction. It was a gathering place for musicians, including Louis Armstrong, who came there to buy instruments, take lessons from music “professors,” and socialize.¹⁵

In 1927 the Karnofskys moved out of the apartment above their store and resettled in the more genteel Carrollton neighborhood. Louis Karnofsky died in 1936, and Tillie Karnofsky died in 1941.

Dr. George Thomas, in addition to owning buildings in the 400 block of South Rampart, was investing in real estate all over the adjacent uptown area during the early years of the twentieth century. He used the newspapers to advertise these houses for sale: “Have you a small cash payment? Houses all over town. Cheap. Deal with the owner, Thomas, 435 S. Rampart.” In at least some cases, Dr. Thomas was targeting the African American market: “Mr. Colored Man! Stop paying rent. I got a good, cheap house on easy payments. Come quick. Geo. A. Thomas, 435 S. Rampart.”¹⁶

In 1907 Dr. Thomas and two other shareholders formed a corporation called Diana Realty Company Limited; Dr. Thomas was president. The purpose of this entity, according to its charter, was to “purchase real estate, bonds, and marketable securities for investment purposes; to hold, sell, mortgage, or...rent property; to construct and improve buildings; and to loan and borrow money.”¹⁷ Such corporations were often created as a means to protect owners from creditors and liability lawsuits. In 1925 Dr. Thomas transferred the Cracker Jack, Karnofsky, and Iroquois Theater sites to Diana Realty for \$35,000 cash.¹⁸ Dr. Thomas continued to operate the Cracker Jack Drug Store at 435 South Rampart, and to act as landlord for the other buildings.

Beginning in 1907, New Orleans Mayor Martin Behrman, District Attorney St. Clair Adams, and Police Chief James Reynolds launched a crackdown on cocaine trafficking and addiction. The topic was covered extensively by the *Item* and the *Times-Picayune*. “The sale of the drug has become alarming,” declared Chief Reynolds to a reporter. “It has taken the place of whiskey and wine among the negroes [*sic*] and the lower class of whites. The most horrible crimes are committed while under the influence of the drug.” Investigators found that many dealers were obtaining cocaine from local pharmacies; these businesses subsequently came under police scrutiny that led to the arrest of several druggists.¹⁹ Dr. Thomas attracted the notice of the police in 1910, through the arrest of Virginia Telfrey, a “negress” who lived nearby at 411 Franklin. Telfrey had dispatched Dave Witmeyer, a white man, to buy cocaine from Thomas’s establishment. She testified that after obtaining a large amount of the drug from Witmeyer, she “put it up in small packages and sold it to such as applied to her.” Charles Lindsey, a clerk at the drugstore, confessed that over a period of several months he had frequently filled prescriptions for Witmeyer, written by Dr. Thomas, averaging two ounces of cocaine.

The Louisiana law of 1898 had stipulated that “It shall be unlawful in this State to sell...at retail any cocaine, except with the written prescription...of an authorized practicing

physician, *other than the physician owning, controlling, or in any manner connected with the store offering the cocaine*” (italics added). Despite the clear directive of this law, Dr. Thomas asserted that he had a right to prescribe cocaine and sell it at his own drugstore, and that “he would continue to do so, and no one could stop him.”²⁰

Thomas and Lindsey were arrested, fined \$25 each, and sentenced to thirty days in jail, but both managed to wriggle out of the charges. Dr. Thomas put the blame on Lindsey and denied having actually sold the cocaine, and Lindsey argued that he was merely an employee at Dr. Thomas’s drugstore and was therefore not responsible for his actions.²¹

Dr. George Thomas had a complicated personal life. In 1893, while vacationing in Florida, he met Sarah Jennings Farrar, and they were married before a judge in Arcadia, a small town in DeSoto County. One daughter was born of this marriage. The relationship didn’t last long, and Dr. Thomas petitioned the New Orleans Civil District Court for a divorce, testifying that “notwithstanding his earnest and affectionate entreaties, his wife without just cause abandoned the conjugal domicile on the 8th of March 1897 [taking their child with her], and has persistently refused to return thereto. That she has left this state permanently, and is now domiciled in Texas.” The divorce was finalized in January 1902.²²

The census for 1900 shows Dr. Thomas living above his drugstore at 1132 Poydras with a woman named Kate Johnson. On February 25, 1902, as soon as his divorce from Sarah Farrar was official, they were married. With this second wife he had another daughter.²³ The 1910 census shows Dr. Thomas, Kate, and their five-year-old child living above the drugstore on South Rampart.²⁴ By the following year, this marriage had also ended in divorce, and according to Kate’s petition to the Civil District Court, “on August 5, 1911, her husband abandoned their domicile at 435 South Rampart Street, and has never returned.” She testified that “On numerous occasions he has publically called her vile names which, out of respect for this honorable court, will not be inserted in this petition, “ and that he “struck her violent blows, causing her great bodily injury.” She further stated that “Regardless of their marriage vows, her husband has lived in adultery with another woman,” and that “by reason of such cruel treatment and outrages, their further living together is unsupportable.” The divorce was granted immediately, and Kate received \$200 a month alimony.²⁵

On September 12, 1912, Dr. George Thomas married Alice Armande Vibart in Bay St. Louis on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Alice, born in 1885 in Bordeaux, France, had come to the United States in 1905. She already had a five-year-old son, Lucien Edmond Artignac, who was born in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, in 1907. Mississippi did not keep birth or marriage records until November 1912, so there is no birth record for Lucien and no record of the marriage of George A. Thomas and Alice Vibart. The baptismal record for Lucien Edmond Artignac, born July 2, 1907, son of Jean Artignac and Alice Vibart, baptized

October 1, 1910, Holy Ghost Church, Hammond, Louisiana, was attached to Alice's succession.²⁶

George Thomas and Alice Vibart had two more sons together: George, born in 1913, and Andre, born in 1915. The family lived above the drugstore at 435 South Rampart until 1918, when the Thomases bought a house at 5620 Hawthorne Place near Lake Pontchartrain and City Park in what is now the affluent Lakeview subdivision. They moved from their apartment above the Cracker Jack to this bucolic setting that was vastly different from the gritty Back-o-Town location of their drugstore and rental properties. In 1920 they bought three adjoining lots.²⁷ Dr. George Thomas, his wife Alice, and their sons were listed there in the 1920 census. Their widely scattered neighbors were all white, and most were American-born.²⁸ These passport photos show the family in 1923, when they made a trip to Europe; Dr. Thomas and Lucien on the left, Alice Vibart Thomas, George, and Andre on the right.



After the Thomases moved to Hawthorne Place, the second floor of 435 South Rampart became a workshop for the manufacture of men's trousers. The Zahn Pants Factory and later the Russell Pants Factory placed newspaper advertisements for workers: "experienced girl operators to work on tailor-made pants," "male help wanted, first-class presser, very good wages, steady job," "colored girl for hand-sewing pants."²⁹

It is unclear exactly when Dr. Thomas's establishment made the shift from an ordinary pharmacy to the city's most famous outlet for hoodoo supplies. The Cracker Jack was certainly operating as a hoodoo drugstore by the 1920s, selling not only to the local trade but also supplying customers all over the eastern United States through its mail-order business.

The United States Post Office began to prosecute mail fraud cases in 1909. The law states that "[Any person], having devised...a scheme or artifice to defraud...by means of...matter...sent or delivered by the Post Office...shall be fined not more than one thousand dollars or imprisoned for not more than five years, or both." Dr. Thomas may have

managed to avoid the notice of Post Office inspectors for a number of years, but on May 14, 1927, the *Morning Tribune* and the *Times-Picayune* published front-page articles about the federal mail-fraud investigation of a South Rampart Street physician for “the distribution of love philters, charms, and voodoo magic” in a “widespread traffic in fake potions extending from New Jersey to Texas.” Inspectors were said to “have unquestioned evidence of mail fraud, through there is some doubt as to placing responsibility for the scheme.” The *Morning Tribune* article, titled “Federal Agents Expose Business in Goofer Dust,” related that “A voodoo practice with headquarters on South Rampart Street...was exposed by federal post office inspectors on Friday. The inspectors found the organization manipulated by an aged white physician. His practice...has been entirely confined to negroes [*sic*] whose superstitious nature has enabled him to found a drugstore dealing in such articles as ‘goofer dust’ [graveyard dirt], ‘eagle eyes,’ and other charms for good and evil... The method used by the voodoo practitioner was to mail out a catalogue of charms ‘purchasable at his drugstore only.’ The list, made up of 250 articles, included black cat bones, blood of hawk, damnation box, Adam and Eve roots, and pictures of the saints.” The investigation was conducted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Edmond E. Talbot, who stated that “he had not determined what form the prosecution would take.”³⁰

According to the newspaper articles, the drugstore also sold books of dream interpretation and magic, such as the occult classic, *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*. The articles especially noted a booklet called *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau*. This small publication bears no relation to the famous nineteenth-century Voodoo priestess of that name. It was written as a series of petitions, each related to a specific problem, followed by instructions for a ritual to alleviate the difficulty using herbs, minerals, washes, oils, powders, incense, and candles available at the drugstore. The petitions, written in archaic, stilted, pseudo-Biblical language, had titles like “The Lady in Trouble with Her Landlord,” “The Lady Whose House Has Been Crossed,” and “The Gentleman Whose Love Is Spurned.” The booklet also contained horoscopes, instructions for praying the Novena, a section on the significance of candles, and a short essay on Spiritism, a doctrine founded by the French occultist Allan Kardec.³¹ Might the French-born Alice Vibart Thomas have been the creator of *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau*?

The New Orleans newspapers made no further mention of the mail-fraud case against the “aged white physician,” and his identity was never revealed. No record of the investigation was found in the Postal Service Inspector's case files at the National Archives or in the records of the United States District Court New Orleans Division. The city directory for 1927 shows five other drugstores on South Rampart between Common and Howard; none was run by a man who was also a physician, leading one to believe that the accused was Dr. George Thomas.³²

It is surprising that the Cracker Jack never advertised its hoodoo supplies in New Orleans' African American newspaper, the *Louisiana Weekly*. But despite the threat of prosecution for mail fraud, in the late 1920s some Chicago and New York merchants did place ads in this newspaper. These were small-time hoodoo entrepreneurs, not large manufacturers and wholesalers. One offered a "lucky ring and lodestone" for "prosperity, success, and good health." Another sold Wise Owl Oil, Money Magnet, and the Black Cat Wishing Bone. Payment was C.O.D.: "Pay the postman [price of item] and postage on arrival and he will give you this wonderful mystic product." Those who did business by mail eventually learned to market their wares as "curios," for which "no claims of supernatural or magical powers is made or inferred." The prevalence of hoodoo belief at that time is borne out by an advertisement in the *Louisiana Weekly* for the recording of "I've Been Hoodooed," performed by Jim Towel on the Brunswick "Race Records" label.³³

A 1928 article in the Sunday magazine section of the *Item-Tribune* was headlined "Voodooism Still Thrives in New Orleans." The writer, Marguerite Young, described a walk around the neighborhood of South Rampart and Poydras streets, where she would have encountered the Cracker Jack: "Here you will find ample evidence of spirit worship and voodoo.... You will see love-potions and spirit-charms displayed...in a drugstore window: Follow-Me Powder, Stay Home Powder, Wish Beans, Good Business Water, Big John the Conqueror, Paradise Seeds, Lucky Spirit Beans, Money Seeds, Peace Water, Gamblers' Luck..."

Ms. Young followed "a dark skinned young woman" into the drugstore and eavesdropped as she complained to the clerk that her husband had "gone down the street to see another woman near every night.... I wants to get him back.... I wants some Stay Home Powder and some War Powder. Gimme 25¢ worth of each, please." The clerk was joined by the owner of the drugstore, probably Dr. Thomas, "whose hair is as white as his face." He "handed the woman a large pink candle" and instructed her to burn it and "say the name of the other woman." He told her to sprinkle Stay Home Powder on her own body and War Powder on her husband's body." Another African American customer was assembling supplies for treasure-hunting, including a Shemhamforas (a magical seal featured in *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*) made from chamois skin lettered with "dove's blood red ink," to "open the pores of the earth." After the customers left, the journalist questioned the druggist and his assistant about the business. "It's simple. You just give them what they ask for." She ascertained that Steel Dust was steel wool sprinkled with brown powder, Blue Luck Powder was laundry bluing, Good Business Oil was machine oil, and Dove's Blood was red ink.³⁴



Spirit Worship
 e Found By
 ighborhood of
 oydras Streets---
 agic and Charms
 mise of

powders on her body—the Stay Home
 der, dark brown, fine. The other
 der, War Powder, she will sprinkle on
 husband's body.
 complete her cure for the situation,
 woman buys a "seal."
 he "seal" is a bit of baby chamols
 ever so soft, cut in the irregular
 e of the sign of Venus. It bears red
 black figuring—intifcate signs and
 ols, and Greek letters. The woman
 put this into an envylope, and once
 sealed nobody will ever see it again—
 pt. of course, the wearer. She will
 it under the ball of her left foot, in
 shoe, first thing every morning, and

Cartoon
 accompanying
 Marguerite Young's
 Item-Tribune article,
 April 22, 1928

The African American novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston was in New Orleans in 1928 and 1929 to conduct research on hoodoo. She apprenticed herself to several practitioners, was initiated, and was thereby qualified to assist with consultations and ceremonies. Her findings were published in the October-December 1931 *Journal of American Folklore* as "Hoodoo in America," and a slightly shorter version was included in her 1935 book *Mules and Men*. Hurston told of being sent out by her mentors to buy ingredients for

the formulation of charms, and specifically mentioned using herbs, powders, washes, and oils such as those sold at the Cracker Jack. In an October 15, 1928, letter to her colleague Langston Hughes, she thanked Hughes for directing her to “the drugstore on Rampart.”³⁵ Hurston had obviously discovered *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau* at the Cracker Jack. Her published works include a series of rituals called the “Marie Laveau routines,” which she claimed to have learned from the nephew of the renowned Voodoo priestess. Most are nearly identical to those found in *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau*--even some misspelled words are reproduced.³⁶

At some undetermined time, Dr. George Thomas began to suffer from mental illness, and in September 1934 he was admitted to the East Louisiana State Hospital in Jackson. This was the same institution to which the great jazz cornetist Buddy Bolden was committed in 1907 and died in 1931.

Alice Vibart Thomas became president of Diana Realty Company Limited while her husband was confined to the State Hospital, and in 1936 Diana Realty sold the Thomas's three buildings on South Rampart (Cracker Jack, Karnofsky Store, and Iroquois Theater) to Louis August Meraux for \$18,000.³⁷ Meraux also acquired the Eagle Saloon building, which had never belonged to George Thomas/Diana Realty.

Louis Meraux was a medical doctor, sheriff, tax collector, and public health officer of St. Bernard Parish, and a cohort of the notorious political boss Leander Perez.³⁸ When Dr. Meraux died in 1938, his estate passed to his only son, Joseph Meraux.³⁹ Why would this wealthy St. Bernard Parish businessman, and his even more wealthy son, want to acquire and retain these unimposing buildings in New Orleans' Back-o-Town? The Merauxs undoubtedly assumed that the Central Business District would advance across South Rampart in the direction of Lake Pontchartrain, and that all property in the way of this “progress” would greatly increase in value.

MARGIN RESERVED FOR BINDING

Form V. S. No. 1-A
N. B.—WRITE PLAINLY WITH UNFADING INK—THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD. Every item of information should be carefully supplied. AGE should be stated EXACTLY. PHYSICIANS should state CAUSE OF DEATH in plain terms, so that it may be properly classified. Exact statement of OCCUPATION is very important.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE Bureau of the Census		STATE OF LOUISIANA BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS		State File No. 7092
District No. 19-2124A		CERTIFICATE OF DEATH		Registrar's No. 6.9.
1. PLACE OF DEATH:		2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED:		
(a) Parish E. Feliciana Ward 3		(a) State Louisiana Parish Orleans		
(b) City or town Jackson La.		(c) City or town New Orleans, La.		
(c) Name of hospital or institution E. La. St. Hosp. Jackson La.		(d) Street No. _____		
(d) Length of stay: In hospital or institution 7 yrs 6 mo 21 da		(e) If foreign born, how long in U. S. A.? 30 years		
In this community 7 yrs 6 mo 21 da				
3(a) FULL NAME D. V. George A. Thomas		MEDICAL CERTIFICATION		
3(b) If veteran, name war _____		20. Date of death: Month May day 31 year 19 40		
3(c) Social Security No. _____		21. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from September 1, 1934 to May 31, 1940 that I last saw him alive on May 31, 1940 and that death occurred on the date stated above at 11:00 a.m.		
4. Sex male	5. Color or race White	6(a) Single, widowed, married, divorced married		IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF DEATH General paralysis of the insane
6(b) Name of husband or wife _____		6(c) Age of husband or wife if alive _____ Years		
7. Birth date of deceased _____		Due to _____		
8. AGE: Years 63		Other conditions _____		
9. Birthplace _____		Major findings: _____		
10. Usual occupation Physician		Of operations _____		
11. Industry or business Dr.		Of autopsy _____		
12. Name _____		22. If death was due to external causes, fill in the following:		
13. Birthplace _____		(a) Accident, suicide, or homicide (specify) _____		
14. Maiden name _____		(b) Date of occurrence _____		
15. Birthplace _____		(c) Where did injury occur? _____		
16(a) Informant's own signature Records E. La. St. Hosp. Jackson, La.		(d) Did injury occur in or about home, on farm, in industrial place, in public place? _____		
(b) Address _____		While at work? _____ (Specify type of place)		
(c) Place: burial or cremation Miss. Orleans La.		(e) Means of injury _____		
17(a) _____ (b) Date thereof 5-31-40		23. Signature J. A. Pagen M.D.		
18(a) Signature of funeral director J. Robert Jackson		Address Jackson La. Date signed 5-31-40		
(b) Address Jackson, La.				
19(a) JUN 9 1940 (Date received local registrar)		(b) W. Richardson (Registrar's signature)		

Dr. Thomas died at age sixty-three at the East Louisiana State Hospital in Jackson on May 31, 1940. His death record states that he had been a resident of the institution for "7 years, 6 months, 21 days." The attending physician said he had treated the deceased from September 1, 1934, to May 31, 1940, and gave "general paralysis of the insane" as the cause of death.

Alice was fifty-five years old when her husband passed away; her three sons, Lucien, George, and Andre, were young adults.



George Thomas's body was returned to New Orleans for interment in the Thomas family tomb in St. Patrick Cemetery no. 2.



In front of the Thomas family tomb is a marble vase inscribed "Dr. G. A. Thomas-Daddy."

Under Louisiana Civil Law, a detailed inventory of a deceased person's estate was taken when his or her succession was opened. Dr. Thomas's property included some land in Jefferson Parish, a farm in Arkansas, the family home on Hawthorn Street plus the furnishings in every room, and a 1939 Dodge automobile. Most interesting is the twenty-page listing of every item from the stock of the Cracker Jack Drug Store. The fixtures consisted of desks, show cases, counters, an iron safe, medical books, shelving, an emulsifying machine, instruments, and a typewriter. There were everyday drugstore items like toiletries, cosmetics, razors, shoe polish, bedpans, feminine hygiene products, office supplies, guitar strings, photographic film, bird seed, roach powder, and an arsenic-based rodent killer called Rough on Rats. There were patent medicines, such as Doan's Pills for backache; Asmador Powder to be burned and inhaled for asthma; Carter's Little Liver Pills, Fletcher's Castoria, Exlax, and Feenamint for constipation; pain relievers like Bayer Aspirin, Happy Day, Stanback, and Goody's Headache Powder; Creomulsion and Terpin Hydrate for colds; Wine of Cardui and Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound for menstrual cramps; Seidlets Powder, Bromo Seltzer and Soda Mint Tablets for indigestion.

At that time a pharmacist most often formulated tablets, capsules, syrups, salves, and teas from his own supply of chemicals and herbs. The Cracker Jack stocked a long list of chemical compounds, and another long list of various drugs, including some that were harsh and potentially dangerous like aconite, arsenic, belladonna, calomel, cannabis, cantharides, digitalis, ergot, ipecac, nux vomica, stramonium, and strychnine. There were also flavorings to make medicine taste and smell better, like almond, cherry, fennel, ginger, orange, peppermint, and sassafras, and coloring agents to make it look more inviting.

The Cracker Jack carried every imaginable dried root and herb. All of them had medicinal properties, but some were also used for magical purposes. Jalap root, a strong purgative imported from Mexico, also was marketed as the famous luck-bringer High John the Conqueror. Galangal root, a member of the ginger family used for sore throats, also was marketed as Chewing John the Conqueror. Viburnum, an anti-spasmodic herb, also was sold as Devil's Shoe Strings. Other medicinal herbs frequently cited as hoodoo ingredients were cayenne pepper, wahoo bark, cinnamon, orris root, cloves, paradise seeds, and asafoetida. The Cracker Jack had them all. The drugstore also had sulfur, bluestone (ferrous sulfate), prepared chalk, and Hoyt's Cologne, all used for hoodoo charm formulation. It had denatured alcohol, oil of cinnamon, oil of lemon grass, oil of rosemary, and oil of cassia, which, according to the hand-written recipes displayed at the New Orleans Pharmacy Museum, were the components of "Van-Van" and "Wa Wa Water." No animal parts were listed, nor was there a stock of "magical" powders, washes, and oils mass produced by large manufacturers.

The only items that definitely indicated that this was no ordinary drugstore were the lodestones and iron filings, horse shoes, incense burners, eight dozen colored candles, seven dozen Sacred Heart of Jesus badges, 4,000 saints' pictures, and stacks of hypnotism books, palmistry books, dream books, and *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*. If the Cracker Jack was still selling *The Life and Works of Marie Laveau*, it was not included in the inventory.⁴⁰

Alice Vibart Thomas was left in charge of the Cracker Jack while her husband was hospitalized, and she assumed ownership after his death in 1940. Even before Dr. Thomas's illness, Lucien Thomas had been assisting his parents at the Cracker Jack while attending Tulane University's School of Pharmacy. He was first listed in the city directory as a clerk at the drugstore in 1927, and continued there as manager, with some interruptions, until it closed in 1974. During much of this time, Lucien, with his wife and children, resided in the Thomas family home on Hawthorne Place.

In 1942, Alice married her old friend and fellow South Rampart Street merchant Morris Karnofsky, who had shortened his surname to Karno. She had known him since the Karnofskys became the Thomases' tenants and neighbors in 1914. Morris was involved in his own music store enterprise and seems to have had nothing to do with the Cracker Jack. Alice and her second husband continued to live in Alice's home at 5620 Hawthorne Place.

Morris Karno died on August 12, 1944. Morris appears to have been a kind and civic-minded man. According to his obituary, he served in the 42nd Infantry "Rainbow" Division during World War I, was a member of the American Legion Post 125 and Rainbow Division Veterans' Association, and was a member of the David R. Graham Lodge no. 413 Free and Accepted Masons. Morris Karno, and indeed the whole Karnofsky family, was very active in Congregation Chevra Thilim. He was interred at Chevra Thilim Cemetery on Canal Street.⁴¹ Alice Thomas Karno, now twice widowed, continued to run the Cracker Jack with the help of her son Lucien Thomas, and there were undoubtedly African American employees as well.

Although the Cracker Jack was probably New Orleans' first twentieth-century hoodoo drugstore, later on there were others. Between 1937 and 1941, fieldworkers from the federally sponsored WPA Louisiana Writers' Project collected information on spiritualists, card readers, advisors, healers, entrepreneurs, and hoodoo drugstores. In addition to the Cracker Jack, they identified other purveyors of hoodoo supplies. Guichard's Pharmacy was located downtown at 841 North Claiborne at Dumaine in the Faubourg Tremé. Hall's Drugstore was at 828 South Rampart. Coleman's Dixie Drugstore was further uptown at 1240 Loyola (later Simon Bolivar) near Erato. Also uptown were Stolzenhalar's Drugstore, 1838 Louisiana at Dryades, and Flach's Pharmacy, 2400 Washington Avenue.⁴²

The folklorist Harry Middleton Hyatt visited New Orleans in 1938 and again in 1940. Hyatt was an ordained Episcopal priest from Quincy, Illinois, who traveled all over the South talking with hoodoo practitioners. The interviews were recorded on wax Telediphone cylinders and later were published in five massive volumes titled *Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork*. Hyatt began his Louisiana fieldwork in March 1938. On this trip he conducted interviews at the Patterson Hotel at 759-761 South Rampart at the corner of Julia Street, just three blocks from the Cracker Jack. On his 1940 trip he worked across the Mississippi River in the Algiers neighborhood. Hyatt interviewed over two hundred people on his two visits to New Orleans.

Hyatt's focus was on traditional African American hoodoo, and he was somewhat dismissive of products concocted by white druggists. Many of his informants nevertheless mentioned the Cracker Jack. One woman interviewed in 1938 indicated that the hoodoo items were no longer displayed prominently for all to buy. When asked where to obtain War Powder, she answered that "You go...and ask the drugstore man--it's the [one] they call the Cracker Jack Drug Store. You see...you got to have somebody to get it what's been dealing with the hoodoos." She cautioned Hyatt that he, as an outsider, couldn't just "go down and buy it there." He needed a connection. After the 1927 mail-fraud investigation, the staff at the Cracker Jack would obviously have been reluctant to sell to a white man who might be an undercover investigator. One person did not refer to the Cracker Jack by name, but said, when Hyatt asked where he had obtained a certain powder used in a fortune-telling ritual, "You buy it at de drug sto'. It's hoodoo stuff. Doc Thomas got it down dere...yeah, right down on Rampart Street."⁴³

Veteran musicians had their memories of the Cracker Jack. The place was immortalized in 1950 by the great bluesman Champion Jack Dupree, when he sang: "Think I'll stroll on down to New Orleans, Go by that Cracker Jack Drug Store, Get myself some of that goofer dust." In 1960, trumpeter Ernest "Punch" Miller was interviewed by Richard B. Allen of the Tulane University Hogan Jazz Archive. He recalled a woman who had a "moonshine joint" and three "sporting houses" in Mobile. She "sent to the Cracker Jack Drug Store here [in New Orleans] for whatever she needed." Punch "took her note to the man, man sent whatever it is to her--everybody else in Mobile gets arrested, [the police] never touch her.... She never gets in trouble, makes plenty of money. She keeps buying that stuff." Another jazzman, banjoist Danny Barker, also mentioned the Cracker Jack as a source for "everything used by the voodoo doctors, from snake hearts to frog titties."⁴⁴

In 1958 the Cracker Jack was no longer designated as a drugstore in the city directory, but was called Cracker Jack Store--Notions. In 1962 the listing changed again to Cracker Jack Store--Religious Items. By this time the Cracker Jack might have been carrying at least some commercially produced spiritual supplies from one of the large wholesalers. The

Miami (later Birmingham) based Sonny Boy Products, in fact, issued a catalog called *The Guide to Success* that seems to be based on the Cracker Jack's *Life and Works of Marie Laveau*.

<p>USE ONLY SONNY BOY PRODUCTS - DO NOT ACCEPT IMITATIONS THE POWER OF PSALMS AND PRAYER CANNOT BE DENIED FROM BOOK #1 & #2 - FIRST PRINTING 1926</p> <p>1. CAN YOU BE LUCKY & GET MANY BLESSINGS - ESPECIALLY MONEY? It Has Been Said: GET 3 BOTTLES "GLORY WATER" Put a handkerchief and a towel in a bowl. Pour on 3 bottles "GLORY WATER". Hang them out to dry. Use only these items as you usually would. Do not allow anyone else to use them. Pray Psalm 67 3 times daily.</p> <p>2. CHIEF DOCTOR TAR SAYS GET RID OF BAD LUCK AND HAVE GOOD LUCK: Joe asked DOCTOR TAR if he could change his bad luck to good luck? Doctor Tar said, most people who do this regularly say it is real lucky. Burn Luck In A Hurry Incenses 3 times a week. Use Old Indian Lucky Hand Rub as directed on bottle. Pour 1 bottle Spiritual Power Oil in your bath water 3 times a week. Sprinkle Commanding Pepper in your shoes daily. Anoint 3 dimes with oil and put them in a dish under your bed and keep it for 30 days, then put it in the church offering Joe always keeps these items in his home, and he is lucky, lucky.</p> <p>3. CAN YOU OVERCOME ADVERTSITY AND OPPRESSION? GET: 2 Special Incense, 2 Special Oils, 2 Indian Spray, 2 Fast Luck Money Drawing Incenses, 2 Drive Away Evil Incenses and Oil Mr. Jeu said he has overcome hard luck, and he always has money, even after he pays his bills. Mr. Jeu says, rub lucky oils on your hands regularly, Burn Drive Away Evil Incense on Monday; Burn Fast Luck Incenses Wednesday; Spray your home with Indian Spray on Friday; Burn Special Incense on Saturday. Pour oil on it after it starts to burn. Mr. Jeu says he has some good luck every day he does these things.</p> <p>4. CAN YOU BE A LUCKY WINNER? GET: 2 Winning Number Incense, 2 Jinx Killer Oil, 2 Grandma's Lucky Hand Oil Ted said he always wins money. This is what he said he does for luck; I anoint my body with Jinx Killer Oil to keep the jinx off me. I use Lucky Hand Oil all the time to keep drawing money. I asked does it work? Ted said, I'm satisfied and I always have money. He said burn Grandma's Winning Number Incense. It is a sure winner!</p> <p>5. CAN YOU HAVE HIGH PEOPLE RECEIVE YOU FAVORABLY? It Has Been Said: Read Psalm 34 and anoint your face with a few drops of CLEAR WATER before coming in contact with the person or persons.</p> <p>6. CAN YOU MAKE A LOVER GIVE YOU MONEY? GET: 2 Fast Luck Money Drawing Incense & Compelling Power Incense; Faye Brown told me her husband always gives her all the money he makes. She said burn 1 tbsp each of Fast Luck Money Drawing and Compelling Power Incenses together, 3 times a week. She sprinkles Angel Sand around things before payday and that will really do it. I thanked her for telling me.</p>	<p>USE ONLY SONNY BOY PRODUCTS-DO NOT ACCEPT IMITATIONS</p> <p>7. CAN YOU READ SCRIPTURE TO COMPEL A LOVED ONE TO RETURN TO YOU? Get: 2 Bottles "GLORY WATER"; 2 LOVE DRAWING POWER BATH; 2 BOTTLES STRONG LOVE COLOGNE It Has Been Said: Read 4th Psalm for 9 days, Take 7 baths with LOVE DRAWING POWER BATH. Anoint your chest with GLORY WATER for 7 days. Use a few drops of STRONG LOVE COLOGNE after each bath.</p> <p>8. CAN YOU READ SCRIPTURE TO KEEP SOMEONE FROM HAVING AN AFFAIR WITH YOUR WIFE, HUSBAND, OR LOVER? Write 37th Psalm on white paper without lines. Wet it with GLORY WATER. Hide it where no one can see it. Use 1 bottle LOVE DRAWING BATH in your bath for 7 days. Use STRONG LOVE COLOGNE when you are with your loved one.</p> <p>9. DO YOU KNOW HOW TO DRAW YOUR LOVED ONE FROM ANOTHER? GET: Uncrossing Incense; Compelling Power Incense; Fast Success Incense; Strong Love Cologne; 7 Holy Spirits Bath Oil. I met Mr. Johnson and he asked me to go along with him to a fortune teller because a man had taken away his only true love. Mr. Johnson told him about his lover leaving him for another and this is what he told Mr. Johnson to do: Read 23rd Psalm. Burn 1 tbsp Uncrossing Power and Compelling Power Incense together for 9 nights. Anoint yourself with Strong Love Cologne each morning for 2 weeks. Use 7 Holy Spirits Bath Oil in your bath water for 7 days; and your love will surely return. Mr. Johnson asked him how much he charged and he said fifty dollars.</p> <p>10. DO YOU KNOW HOW TO COMPEL A PERSON TO DO WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO? GET: Compelling Power Incense & Oil; Spiritual Power Incense; Fast Luck Money Drawing Incense & Oil; Make Your Wish Sand; My friend wanted her employer to pay her back pay. A Witch Doctor told her: Mix Make Your Wish Sand, Fast Luck Money Drawing Incense and Oil, and Spiritual Power Incense in a paper bag and sprinkle around the outside of your home before sunrise daily for 7 days. Burn Compelling Power Incense with a few drops of oil daily for 9 days. Put Make Your Wish Sand in your shoe. I saw Minnie a month later and she told me she was living better than ever.</p> <p>11. CAN YOU RUN A PERSON OUT OF TOWN? GET: 7 Drive Away Evil Incense; 2 Stop Evil Floor Wash; Spiritual Power Oil Mrs. Suzie Q said neighbors were trying to harm her family and causing trouble, also, there was a woman trying to break up her home. She said a witch doctor knew her troubles and told her what to do: Wash floors 3 times a week with Stop Evil Floor Wash; pour Spiritual Power Oil outside your home. Burn Drive Away Evil Incense with the bone of a fish you have eaten, and sprinkle on their property. Suzie said they moved within 1 month. She did not know where they went. ©</p>
--	--

Sonny Boy *Guide to Success*, collection of Carolyn Long

Several historians whose interest was primarily in the former jazz venues in the 400 block of South Rampart attempted to observe the commerce at the Cracker Jack in the 1960s. Richard Allen of Tulane University's Hogan Jazz Archive noted that he "went in once to buy some stuff for a cold, and they couldn't understand anybody coming in to buy legitimate medicine.... It's not 'open' to outsiders." Jack Stewart recalls being ignored by the clerk when he entered the store.⁴⁵

Bob Newman, a high-school friend of Lucian Thomas's son in the late 1950s, remembers the Cracker Jack as an unremarkable place that sold drugstore items and other necessities, with the hoodoo merchandise toward the back behind a divider. He often visited the Thomas family home on Hawthorne Place, and described his friend's grandmother, Alice

Thomas Karno, as a large, amiable lady who spoke with a heavy French accent. She “didn’t get around very well,” and Newman never knew her to work regular hours at the Cracker Jack.⁴⁶

Despite her disability, Alice Karno was still at least somewhat involved in the operation of the business. In August, 1969, as eighty-three-year-old Mrs. Karno was closing up the shop, she was attacked and robbed by an unidentified man who subsequently escaped. She was listed in serious condition at Charity Hospital.⁴⁷ The neighborhood was becoming dangerous, and this, coupled with declining health and the concerns of her family, might have induced her to retire completely.

Much of the South Rampart Street commercial strip and surrounding residential neighborhood was razed in the mid-1950s during the tenure of Mayor DeLesseps S. Morrison. In November 1955 the *Times-Picayune* announced that “in place of a slum,” New Orleans would gain a new civic center, including an eleven-story International-style city hall, the adjacent civil district court, a park, a state office building, and a new main public library.⁴⁸

In Place of a Slum, a Civic Center

Group of government buildings will rank with the best in the nation

IF ANY CITY can be considered lucky in having a slum, New Orleans really hit the jackpot with the sprawl of tumbledown shanties and tenements that used to occupy the site of its new civic center.

It's not unusual for a city to have a dilapidated residential section in its heart. On the contrary, a city would be unusual if it didn't. These residential sections grew up when the cities' populations were smaller, when transportation was not so advanced and people wanted to live close to their work.

As the cities grew and transportation improved, people moved further out, leaving the central area to the lower income groups. The result: Slums.

When the planners were looking for a site for a civic center here, however, New Orleans was extremely fortunate to have such a strategically located slum as the 11-acre area roughly bounded by Loyola, Poydras, La Salle and Gravier.

The late Brooke H. Duncan, former director of the city planning commission, who conceived the idea of the center, urged that the city buy this area as early as 1945. He pointed out that besides being adjacent to the business district, it was one of New Orleans' worst slums.

As it stood, the section discouraged further business growth in that area. A housing project would have eliminated the slum but in itself also would have discouraged business growth.

So, by picking that area, the city could have a spot to put its center and cut out a serious blight in one fell swoop.

Duncan never lived to see the huge orange skeleton of the new City Hall now rising at Loyola and Poydras. Before he died in 1950, however, the city had been at work two years, buying the land and cleaning away the rotten frame dwellings that stood on it.

Duncan's place has been taken by his former assistant, Louis Bisso, a dynamic individual popping with vitamins and words like “ethnological” and “causative factors,” who likes to think of New Orleans as a worn-an patient suffering from both a cancer (slums) and hardening of the arteries (traffic congestion).

“She can be cured, don't worry about that,” he says. “She will be cured. But it will be some job.”

The civic center is just part of the cure. But it's an integral part of a 25-year plan started in 1950, when New Orleans' population was 570,000, and is geared to put the city in shape to handle the estimated 804,000 residents it will have in 1975.

The plan includes building thoroughfares, overpasses, bridges and the like so that people can get into the heart of the city and out again with a minimum of frayed tempers and crumpled fenders.

The main purpose of the center is to preserve the present central business district. Or—going further—to maintain the entire economic base of the city.

The planners figure that, by grouping the municipal buildings close to the business district, the whole area becomes easier to get to and far more attractive, and discourages the current trend toward decentralization. It also stimulates other new growth in the central business district.

When completed, the civic center will be one of the few co-ordinated series of government buildings in the

Continued on Page 8

DIXIE, TIMES-PICAYUNE STATES ROTO MAGAZINE, NOVEMBER 27, 1955 7

By 1960, there were twelve vacant buildings on both sides of the 400 block of South Rampart, but the Cracker Jack continued to do business at number 435. In 1971, construction began on the new Louisiana Superdome, which opened in 1975. Office towers

in excess of fifty stories sprang up in the Central Business District. The Cracker Jack and other low-rise buildings were doomed.

On March 9, 1972, the New Orleans City Council, acting on an inspection by the Department of Safety and Permits, authorized the demolition of 441, 439, and 435 South Rampart Street. These buildings, according to the report, had “become dilapidated and in a state of disrepair and been declared a public nuisance.” Since the owners had not voluntarily razed the buildings, the City Purchasing Agent was authorized to secure bids for the demolition and removal of debris at the owner’s expense.⁴⁹ Numbers 441 and 439, as well as many other buildings on South Rampart, had been vacant for years, but the Cracker Jack was still a thriving business until the time of the demolition. Lucien Thomas relocated the store a few blocks away to 183 South Prieur Street, corner of Cleveland. In June and July 1972, he placed notices in the *Times-Picayune* advising customers that “The Cracker Jack Store had to move,” and giving the new address and phone number.

According to a 1973 article by Stella Pitts in the Sunday magazine of the *Times-Picayune*, 183 South Prieur was a slate-gray building bearing only the name “Cracker Jack.” Inside, there were a few drugstore items that were “as dusty and faded as though they had been in the same spot for years, neglected and forgotten...a few bars of soap and some packages of razor blades, stacks of batteries and small containers of toothpicks, faded ribbons and tins of foot powder, laxatives and old jars of ink, rubber syringes and notebook paper.” But the “real” merchandise at the Cracker Jack was the roots and herbs, powders, oils, washes, baths, incense, religious medals, holy cards, and candles. In addition to selling the usual commercially produced items, with labels such as Attraction, Jinx-Removing, Power, Money-Drawing, Fast Luck, Compelling, Peaceful Home, and Come to Me, somebody, possibly Lucien Thomas, was filling hoodoo “prescriptions.”

The Stella Pitts article described “a small but steady stream of people [who] are in and out of the Cracker Jack, usually sitting one-at-a-time on a wooden chair behind the high glass counter at the rear as they wait for their orders to be filled. Behind the counter are shelves lined with all sizes and shapes of bottles, containing colored liquids and powders. Many brown paper sacks, wrapped and tied with strings, fill another shelf.... And on the table nearby, where the proprietor works, are hundreds of tiny glass bottles, waiting to be filled when the formulas are mixed. ‘Medicine’ is the answer given when questions are raised about the activities going on behind this counter.”⁵⁰

The Cracker Jack closed for good in 1974, and 183 South Prieur has since been demolished for parking lots and garages. Alice Vibart Thomas Karno died the following year, on June 9, 1975, at age eighty-nine. Her death notice in the *Times-Picayune* named her three sons, Lucien Thomas, Dr. George Thomas, and Dr. Andre Thomas, and stated that she was also survived by five grandchildren, was a member of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, and was interred in St. Patrick Cemetery No. 2 .

Mrs. Karno had made her will on February 20, 1975. The primary heirs were her “beloved children.” She left the stock, furniture, and fixtures of the Cracker Jack to her grandson, Lucien Thomas Jr. Unlike the marvelously detailed inventory attached to Dr. Thomas’s 1940 succession, there is no further information here to tell us exactly what was being sold at the Cracker Jack. In 1975, Alice owned two houses in Carrollton, the family home on Hawthorne Place, household furnishings, and a 1965 Oldsmobile. Most of her assets were represented by her ninety-one shares of Diana Realty Company stock. She left a bequest of \$400 to Chris Christian, whose address was given as Cracker Jack, 138 South Prieur. Christian was evidently a long-time employee.⁵¹

Of the hoodoo drugstores documented by the Louisiana Writers’ Project in 1937-1941, only the Cracker Jack and the Dixie Drugstore survived past the 1960s. The Dixie, the last of New Orleans’ old-time hoodoo drugstores, continued to sell spiritual products until 1984. Reverend William M. James’ “novelty shop of religious articles” and “St. Jude Altar” operated at 545 South Rampart from the 1960s until the mid-1980s. A card from the novelty shop, dated December 3, 1970, was found in the "Voodoo" file at Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University:

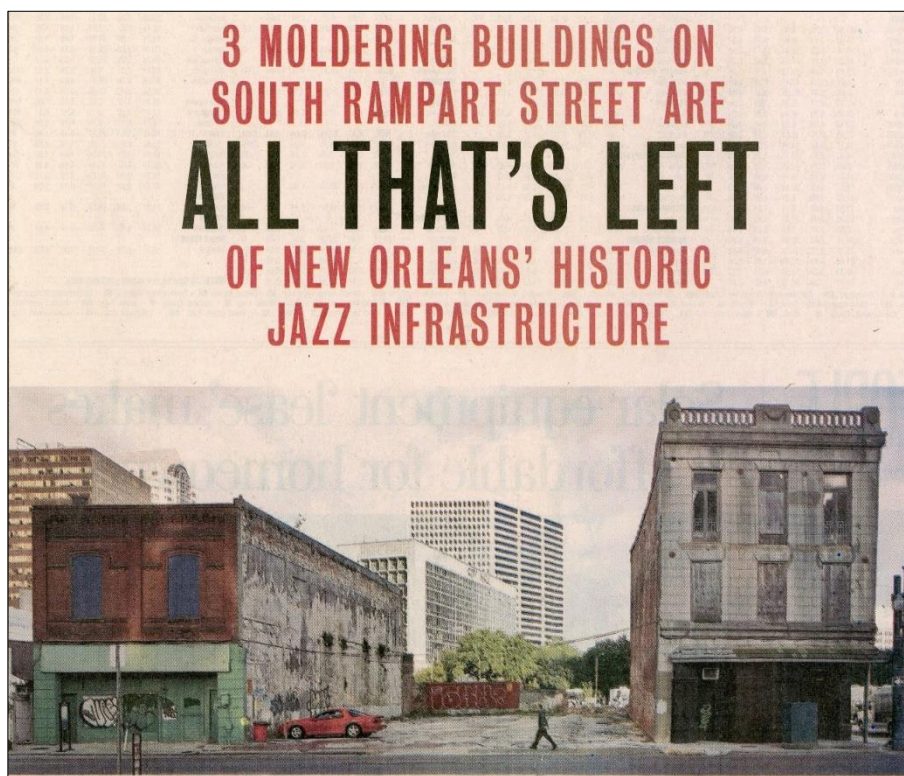
STOP! YOU MAY BE UNAWARE OF THE
PROBLEMS THAT I CAN HELP YOU SOLVE
ST. JUDE ALTAR
REV. W.M. JAMES
NOVELTY SHOP OF RELIGIOUS ARTICLES
545 SO. RAMPART ST. MA-7717
NEW ORLEANS, LA.

- At present there are several tourist-oriented shops in the French Quarter, but only Island of Salvation in the New Orleans Healing Center on St. Claude Avenue and the F & F Botánica and Spiritual Church Supply Company at the corner of Broad and St. Ann streets serve the multi-racial practitioners of the myriad spiritual traditions represented in New Orleans.

The New Orleans Civic Center—the city hall, civil district court, and main public library—have not aged well. The state office building was demolished after extensive damage from Hurricane Katrina and had to be rebuilt. The park is mostly occupied by the homeless. Between this depressing enclave and the Central Business District lies what is left of South Rampart Street. Four buildings remained in the 400 block—the Little Gem Saloon, the Karnofsky Store, the Iroquois Theater, and the Eagle Saloon. All but the Little Gem were owned by the Arlene and Joseph Meraux Charitable Foundation, an entity created in 1992 after the death of Joseph Meraux. In 1993, jazz historians and preservationists became

alarmed about the deterioration of these structures and submitted a landmark nomination. The executive director of the Downtown Development District wrote to the Central Business District Landmarks Commission that the “DDD is not supportive of landmark designation” because such designation conflicted with the Growth Management Plan for downtown New Orleans and “the need to stimulate the...Poydras/Loyola node as principal centers of modern, high-rise office and hotel development.”

Dr. Bruce Boyd Raeburn, director of the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University, wrote in support of the landmark nomination that “the 400 block of South Rampart Street represents one of the very best examples of early jazz ambience extant, and should be accordingly preserved.” John Hasse, curator of American Music at the Smithsonian Institution, declared that “There is probably no other block in America with buildings bearing so much significance to the history of our country's great art form, jazz.” Despite this expert testimony, only in 2008 were the Karnofsky Store, the Iroquois Theater, and the Eagle Saloon designated as New Orleans landmarks, subject to the jurisdiction of the Central Business District Historic District Landmarks Commission.⁵²



Times-Picayune, May 8, 2011. The Iroquois Theater is on the left and the Eagle Saloon is on the right.

The Little Gem Saloon at the corner of South Rampart and Poydras had already been purchased and renovated and has been put back into use as a fine restaurant and jazz club.

In 2007 an entrepreneur bought the Eagle Saloon building from the Meraux Foundation. Although the new owner attempted to stabilize the structure, he was unable to fulfill his promise to convert it into a “New Orleans Music Hall of Fame.” In 2013 the Karnofsky Store and Iroquois Theater buildings continued to stand forlorn and abandoned in a dreary no-man’s-land surrounded by looming skyscrapers and a vast expanse of surface parking lots.⁵⁵



View of the Eagle Saloon, Iroquois Theater, Karnofsky Store, and Little Gem from the 11th floor of a tall office building at 1340 Poydras Street. The Civil District Court building protrudes into the picture in the lower left. Photo by Carolyn Long 2013.

It is hoped that these early twentieth century structures, so important to New Orleans’ African American history and especially to the history of jazz, can also be restored and put to some appropriate purpose. But sadly, the Cracker Jack Drug Store is gone forever.

Notes

1. For more on the evolution of the “spiritual products” business, see Carolyn Morrow Long, *Spiritual Merchants: Religion, Magic, and Commerce* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001)
2. Ibid, 187-219.
3. Birth record for George Andre Thomas, son of Andre Thomas and Ellen Massin, born March 29, 1874, vol. 62, p. 374, Louisiana State Archives.
4. G.A. Thomas, New Orleans, is listed in the Tulane University School of Medicine’s *Jambalaya Yearbook* as a member of the graduating class of 1907, p. 54, <http://archive.org/details/jambalayayearboo12edit>. George A. Thomas, 435 S. Rampart, New Orleans, is listed in the American Medical Directory, 3rd Edition, 1912, p. 497, and 4th Edition, 1914, p. 621. Thanks to Mary J. Holt, Information Services, Tulane University, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library and Rudolph Matas Library for the Health Sciences.
5. Thanks to Pamela Arceneaux of The Historic New Orleans Collection for directing me to microfilms of the Blue Books. Her book, *Guidebooks to Sin: The Blue Books of Storyville, New Orleans*, was published by THNOC in 2017.
6. No original copy of *The Complete Root Doctor* has been discovered. The Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, has a photocopy.
7. Randy Fertel, “The Birth of Jazz and the Jews of South Rampart Street,” *Tikkun Magazine*, October 4, 2011, <http://www.tikkun.org>.
8. Donald M. Marquis, *In Search of Buddy Bolden, First Man of Jazz* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 40-41.
9. Abraham Schulmann to George A. Thomas, lot with buildings and improvements, First District, lot 6, Square 297 bounded by South Rampart, Poydras, Basin, and Perdido, Acts of Jefferson Charles Wenck, May 16, 1906, vol. 50, act 82. Schulmann had acquired the lot with buildings and improvements from Juana Brisolaro, widow of Justo Garcia y Leon, Acts of Theodore J. Cotonio, August 25, 1899, vol. 7, act 479. Garcia acquired the lot with buildings and improvements from Etienne Masquerre, Acts of Joseph Fahey, July 3, 1878, vol. 16, act 244. All from Notarial Archives Research Center (hereafter NARC).
10. Lists of dealers for Durham Duplex Razor Company, including the Cracker Jack Drug Store, *Item*, July 14, 1914, p. 15.
11. Selig Paillet to George A. Thomas, lot with buildings and improvements, First District, lot 26, Square 297 bounded by South Rampart, Poydras, Basin, and Perdido, Acts of J.C. Wenck, July 6, 1909, vol. 58A, act 174, NARC. Paillet had acquired the property from Widow Henry Jacobs, Acts of

Felix J. Dreyfus, April 5, 1909, COB 228, p. 85. "Christmas Gift Fund," *Times-Picayune*, December 9, 1914, p. 14; "Negro Fund Benefit at Iroquois Theater-- Movie Show to Aid Xmas Gifts for Race's Children," *Times-Picayune*, December 9, 1920, p. 28. Lynn Abbott and Jack Stewart, "The Iroquois Theater," *The Jazz Archivist* 9 (December 1994), Newsletter of the William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, 3-20.

12. Jacob Itzkovitch to George A. Thomas, two lots with buildings and improvements, First District, lots 7 and 8, Square 297 bounded by South Rampart, Poydras, Basin, and Perdido, Acts of J.C. Wenck, August 17, 1909, vol. 58A, act 216, NARC. Itzkovitch had acquired the property from Mrs. Jeremiah Leary, Acts of E. Beer, June 11, 1909.

13. U.S. Census for New Orleans 1910, Ward 3, Enumeration District 38, sheet 13A, line 1, accessed through Ancestry.com.

14. Louis Armstrong, "Storyville--Where the Blues Were Born," *True* 21, no. 126 (1947), 32, 100-105; unpublished handwritten manuscript page reproduced in Gary Giddins, *Satchmo* (New York, 1988), 63.

15. Interview with John Brunious by Bill Russell, May 26, 1959, New Orleans Geography, Rampart Street, p. 8, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University. Regarding Armstrong's connection to Morris Music and the pending destruction of the building, see Lolis Eric Elie, "A Sickening Vision of N.O. History," *Times-Picayune*, June 26, 2002

16. Advertisements in the *Times-Picayune* and *Item*, August 15, 1908; October 5, 1908; March 27, 1910; April 9, 1910; May 12, 1912; June 9, 1912; November 3, 1912.

17. Acts of Incorporation Diana Realty Limited, Acts of J.C. Wenck, October 18, 1907, vol. 54, act 217, NARC. The other shareholders were Percival T. Simpson, who has no apparent connection to the Thomas family, and W. Waller Young, clerk for notary J.C. Wenck.

18. George A. Thomas to Diana Realty Company Ltd., lots with buildings and improvements, First District, lots 6, 7- 8, and 26, Square 297 bounded by South Rampart, Poydras, Basin, and Perdido, Acts of T.J. Dobbins, May 28, 1925, COB 393, p. 310.

19. "Dope War in Hands of Police," *Item*, September 1, 1907, p. 10; "Druggists in Toils for Selling Poisonous Drugs--Three Proprietors Arrested for Disposing of Cocaine," *Item*, September 8, 1907; "Mayor Strikes at Cocaine Evil," *Times-Picayune*, September 18, 1907, p. 6; "Ordered To Raid Drug Stores Where Cocaine Is Sold," August 22, 1908, *Times-Picayune*, p. 7; "Cocaine Campaign Waxing Warmer," August 27, 1908, *Times-Picayune*, p. 11.

20. "Cocaine Victims Hard to Handle," *Item*, September 17, 1910, p. 10; "Will Regulate Sale of Deadly Cocaine," *Item*, October 22, 1910, p. 1 and 2; "Druggist and Doctor Held on Charge of Selling Cocaine," *Times-Picayune*, December 3, p. 4.

-
21. "Two Sentenced for Selling Cocaine," *Item*, December 7, 1910, p. 2; "Judges Join in Deciding Cocaine Cases, Holding Only Clerk Responsible," *Times-Picayune*, April 7, 1910, p. 5; "Cocaine Seller Applies for Pardon--Charles B. Lindsay Declares He Was Not Responsible for Sale of Drug," *Item*, May 7, 1911, p. 1. The case was tried in the First City Criminal Court, but the records have not survived.
 22. Divorce suit, George A. Thomas v. Sarah Jennings Farrar, his wife, Orleans Parish Civil District Court, docket no. 58-873, filed March 23, 1899, finalized January 29, 1902, microfilm NOPL. Their marriage certificate is attached; there is no birth record for their daughter Helene.
 23. Information about this marriage and the birth of their daughter Gertrude comes from Succession of George A. Thomas. There is no marriage record for the couple and no birth record for their daughter Gertrude.
 24. U.S. Census for New Orleans 1900, ED 22, sheet 94A, line 37; U.S. Census for New Orleans 1910, ED 31, sheet 27A, line 29. Also living in the household were five boarders, one a druggist and one an apprentice druggist, plus two men from Russia/Poland who were engaged in the dry goods business. Their neighbors came from Italy, France, Russia, Poland, and Austria.
 25. Divorce suit, Mrs. George A. Thomas [Kate Johnson] v. George A. Thomas, her husband, Orleans Parish Civil District Court, docket no. 97-856, filed August 10, 1911, finalized August 14, 1911, microfilm NOPL.
 26. Succession of Alice Vibart Thomas Karno, Civil District Court, Division D, no. 597-314, filed August 15, 1975.
 27. Sale of two lots with buildings and improvements, Second District, Square 424 bounded by Hawthorn Place, Homedale Street, Woodlawn Street, and Florida Avenue, lots 39 and 40, by Third District Building Association to Alice Vibart, wife of George A. Thomas, for \$3,000, Acts of Fred Zengel, January 5, 1918, COB 294, p. 172; sale of adjacent three lots 36, 37 and 38 by Mary Louise Brisvois, wife of Walter Speanly to Alice Vibart, wife of George A. Thomas, for \$1,500, Acts of John Wagner, July 17, 1920, COB 324, p. 43.
 28. U.S. Census for New Orleans 1920, Ward 4, ED 75, sheet 13B, line 64.
 29. L. Zahn Pants Factory, 435 S. Rampart, *New Orleans States*, November 14, 1918, April 29, 1919; Russell Pants Factory, 435 S. Rampart, *New Orleans States*, June 11, 1919, *Times-Picayune* May 20, 1923.
 30. *Morning Tribune*, May 14, 1927, p. 1, c. 3; "Voodoo by Mail Business Bared in New Orleans--U.S. Investigating Sale of 'Black Cat Bones,' 'Goofer Dust,' Etc.," *Times-Picayune*, May 14, 1927, p. 1.
 31. I have been unable to find a copy of the original booklet, but an undated reprint was issued as *Marie Laveau's Old and New Black and White Magic* by Fulton Religious Supply Company of Brooklyn,

and another, called *Marie Laveau's Original Black and White Magic*, was published by Indio Products of Los Angeles in 1991.

32. Soards' New Orleans Directory 1927: John Otto, 241 South Rampart; Alix Perry, 601 South Rampart; Frank Ferrell, 701 South Rampart; Mrs. Gertrude Berendsohn, 736 South Rampart; Keith Kath, 836 South Rampart.

33. *Louisiana Weekly*, April 17, 1929.

34. Marguerite Young, "Voodooism Still Thrives in New Orleans," *New Orleans Item-Tribune*, April 22, 1928, Magazine Section, p. 5.

35. Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, August 6, 1928, in Kaplan, ed., *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, 124; see also Hurston to Hughes September 20, 1928 (126), October 15, 1928 (127), November 22, 1928 (131), and December 10, 1929 (155).

36. Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo in America," *Journal of American Folklore* 44, no. 174 (1931); Paraphernalia of Conjure 411-417, Laveau routines 327-57. *Mules and Men*, Paraphernalia of Conjure 273-285; Laveau routines 195-198.

37. Real Estate Transfers, *Times-Picayune*, November 17, 1936, p. 27.

38. L.A. Meraux, intern at Charity Hospital, is listed in the Tulane University School of Medicine's *Jambalaya Yearbook* as a member of the graduating class of 1904, p. 123. Louis A. Meraux, 111 Angela Avenue, is listed in the American Medical Directory, 1st Edition, 1906, p. 364.

39. "Funeral Service Is Conducted for Dr. Louis Meraux—Sheriff of St. Bernard Parish Buried in Metairie Cemetery," *Times-Picayune*, October 8, 1938, p. 2; "Leander Perez's rise to power in St. Bernard, Plaquemines," *Times-Picayune*, October 24, 2011.

40. Succession of Dr. George A. Thomas, Orleans Parish Civil District Court, Division C, docket no. 235-703, opened June 13, 1940.

41. "Funeral Arranged for Morris Karno," *Times-Picayune*, August 13, 1944, p. 9. *Times-Picayune* advertisements for Morris Music until December 1949.

42. Interviews by Robert McKinney and Hazel Breaux, 1937, Louisiana Writers' Project, folder 44, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana at Natchitoches.

43. Hyatt, *Hoodoo-Conjure-Witchcraft-Rootwork*, vol. 4, 3224.

-
44. Interview with Punch Miller by Richard B. Allen, April 4, 1960, New Orleans Geography, Rampart Street, p. 13, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University. Danny Barker, *Buddy Bolden and the Last Days of Storyville*, edited by Alyn Shipton, London: Cassell, 1998.
45. Richard B. Allen, interview April 4, 1960; Jack Stewart, interview by the author, February 24, 2013.
46. Bob Newman, interview by the author February 27, 2013. I met Mr. Newman in St. Patrick Cemetery no. 2 when he was there for the interment ceremony for Lucien Thomas Jr. and I was photographing the Thomas family tomb.
47. "Woman, 83, Beaten During Robbery," *Times-Picayune*, August 14, 1969, p. 55.
48. "Once a Slum Area Bounding the Central Business District...Site of the new City Hall," *Times-Picayune*, January 16, 1955, p.1 ; "Mayor's Report Lists Projects," *Times-Picayune*, May 3, 1955, p. 9; "In Place of a Slum, a Civic Center," *Times-Picayune*, November 27, 1955.
49. New Orleans City Council Official Proceedings, March 9, 1972, Box AB301, NOPL; "City Council," *Times-Picayune*, March 10, 1972, p. 20.
50. Stella Pitts, "Marie Laveau, the Voodoo Queen," *Dixie*, Sunday Magazine of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 28, 1973, p. 26-28, 38-41.
51. Succession of Alice Vibart Thomas Karno, Civil District Court, Division D, no. 597-314, filed August 15, 1975.
52. Landmark nomination 1993; Landmark Designation Report, Central Business District Landmarks Commission, December 5, 2008.